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Caregiver Stress And Resources for Support

Alex DiSciullo
University of Vermont

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Caregiver Stress and Resources for Support

BY: ALEXANDER DISCIULLO

FAMILY MEDICINE CLERKSHIP JUL-AUG 2018

BERLIN FAMILY PRACTICE

PRECEPTOR: KRISTOPHER JENSEN

Problem Identification and Description of Need

- ▶ 65 million people, 29%, of the US population provides care to a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member.¹
- ▶ The average time spent caregiving is 20 hours/week.¹
- ▶ 53% of caregivers report feeling high levels of emotional stress²
- ▶ Studies have shown higher rates of depression, anxiety, and psychotropic medication usage among caregivers under stress^{3,4}
- ▶ Studies have shown that caregivers experiencing emotional and physical strain have mortality risks that are 63% higher than matched controls.⁵
- ▶ 78% of adults in need of long term care depend on family and friends as their only source of help.⁶
 - ▶ This number shows that there is a necessity to make caregivers aware of the resources available to them

Public Health Costs

- ▶ The value of the services family caregivers provide for free in the US, when caring for older adults, is estimated to be \$375 billion a year. That is almost twice as much as is actually spent on homecare and nursing home services combined (\$158 billion)⁷
- ▶ In Vermont, there are 74,900 caregivers with the economic value of caregiving estimated to be over \$1 billion.⁸
- ▶ Specific numbers for Central Vermont were unavailable, however, during my rotation I saw multiple patients, including Alzheimer's and Down Syndrome patients, with caregivers present.

Community Perspective

- ▶ How has caregiver stress affected the families you have treated over the years?
 - ▶ “Not only does caregiver stress increase the risk for developing anxiety and depression, it can also disrupt family dynamics and put serious strain on relationships within the family” – Dale Stafford, M.D – Family Medicine Berlin
- ▶ How aware are your patients and community of caregiver stress?
 - ▶ “Caregiver Stress is under advertised and often overlooked in the community” – Brian Rodriguez, M.D – Family Medicine Berlin
- ▶ What are some resources you inform patients about who are experiencing stress ?
 - ▶ “Project independence and the Central Vermont Council for Aging are some of the resources I tell my patients about” – Laura Phillips MSW – Family Medicine Berlin

Interventions and Methodology

- ▶ As stated, 78% of adults requiring long term care have family members as their only source of care. There is a need for an intervention to reduce this number and improve the quality of life of caregivers and the burden of cost.
- ▶ Intervention
 - ▶ Create a pamphlet which informs caregivers of health effects of caregiver stress and the resources available to them to combat this. Pamphlets were distributed in the exam rooms and waiting room, given to social workers, and physicians were informed of it's presence.
- ▶ Methodology
 - ▶ Researched peer reviewed publications on the health consequences of caregiver stress and interventions to reduce stress.
 - ▶ Researched the Alzheimer's Association, Central Vermont Home and Hospice, and Central Vermont Council for Aging websites for information regarding caregiver resources.
 - ▶ Spoke with multiple providers in the area including family medicine physicians and social workers to learn more about how caregiver stress affects families and resources available which can help combat stress.

Results/Response

- ▶ This intervention received a positive response from the faculty in Berlin. They appreciated the fact that Caregiver stress is often a topic that is overlooked and lacks information that is easy to access.
- ▶ “This was an excellent idea for a project. I do not think this topic has been covered in quite some time” – Lise Kowalski, M.D – Family Medicine Berlin
- ▶ “This looks great! Caregiver Stress is under advertised and a pamphlet like this can certainly help to raise awareness” – Brian Rodriguez, M.D – Family Medicine Berlin
- ▶ “Let’s make sure the pamphlets get placed in every exam room so that our providers have quick access to them if they sense their patient is experiencing stress” – Kris Jensen, M.D – Family Medicine Berlin

Evaluation of effectiveness and limitations

- ▶ Proposed assessment of effectiveness:
 - ▶ If physicians and social workers suspect a patient/family member is under caregiver stress, they were encouraged to have this person fill out a screening tool for caregiver stress which I acquired from the American Medical Association (see attachment). Record their score and provide them with the pamphlet that was created (see attachment).
 - ▶ At their next visit, ask if they used any resources addressed in the pamphlet. If the answer is yes, have them complete the same form from the AMA. Record new score and record the difference between the original score and the new score to determine if there was any improvement.
- ▶ Limitations
 - ▶ Although the difference in scores between the original score and new score after intervention will quantitatively tell us if caregiver stress has been reduced it does not inform us if a statistically significant reduction in risk for morbidity and mortality has been achieved.

Recommendations for Future Interventions/Projects

1. Increase the number of subjects to increase accuracy of results
 - ▶ Institute the same intervention in other Central Vermont family medicine practices including Granite City Primary Care and Barre Health Center over a 12 month period and pool results.
2. Add a section to the pamphlet regarding financial resources.
 - ▶ Paying for resources can be a barrier for caregivers. I would like to work more closely with social workers and Medicare/Medicaid representatives to learn more about financing options for caregivers
3. Transform the Pamphlet into a EMR compatible form which patients and family members will have access to at any time.

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